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Integrating Race, Racism, and Critical Consciousness in Black Parents' Engagement With Schools

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Although decades of research document the positive benefits of parent involvement in schools, Black parents are not always welcomed in schooling spaces. Black parents have sometimes been perceived as uncaring about their children's education, and often racism has precluded their full inclusion and meaningful participation. This article uses critical race theory to understand the ways that racism influences Black parents' experiences in schools. We propose a novel form of parent involvement—critical parent engagement—which we define as parents' recognition of issues related to race and racism in schools that informs the actions they take to ensure their children's academic success. This new conceptualization of parent involvement relies on critical race theory and critical consciousness theory to provide a conceptual framework to understand

This is the author manuscript accepted for publication and has undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record. Please cite this article as doi: 10.1111/jftr.12344

how Black parents critically analyze issues that are present in the schools and how they subsequently engage in action. We conclude with suggestions for future research and practice.

Key Words: Black parents, critical consciousness, critical race theory, parent engagement.

Schools often use traditional definitions of parent involvement, leading them to deem Black parents as uninvolved and to overlook the multiple ways in which these parents participate in their children's education (Cooper, 2009; Fine, 1993; Reynolds, 2015; Wilson, 2019). Parent behaviors that constitute traditional parent–school involvement include attendance at parent–teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, and joining the parent–teacher association (Epstein, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Scholars have recognized that White, middle- to upper-class parents engage in these behaviors more easily, as a result of greater flexibility in their schedules, availability of capital, and power structures within schools that systematically marginalize parents of color (Olivos, 2006; Reynolds, 2015; Wilson, 2019). In this article, we problematize the forms of involvement that schools privilege by explaining how race and racism influence both schools' perceptions of Black parents' involvement and Black parents' perceptions of schools—using critical race theory (CRT), which originated in critical legal studies. Additionally, we use the critical consciousness (CC) paradigm to illustrate how Black parents' beliefs and motivations shape the ways they choose to engage with their children's schools.

Schools are structured around unspoken rules and norms for involvement. Delpit (1988) asserted that these norms and subsequently assigned roles generally create a "culture of power" that negatively affects those with less power—usually people of color and those experiencing poverty. This supports Kreisberg's (1992) notion of "power with" versus "power over," which creates social justice inequity in that the distribution of power with respect to ability to make decisions is unfair. This imbalance creates an ideal held by many educators of what an "involved parent" looks like. School faculty and staff sometimes fail to fully understand the role that race plays in their perceptions of Black parents and how race and class systemically and systematically constrain Black parents' involvement in schools, therefore perpetuating the power imbalance and racial inequities that already exist in schools (Howard & Reynolds 2008). There is a large body of work that offers examples of how parents of color act as agents of change and advocate on behalf of their children's education (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Cooper, 2009; Cooper & McCoy, 2009; Wilson, 2019). For instance, Cooper (2009) describes the strong legacy of Black parents' educational involvement and the ways they have historically advocated on behalf of their children, other families, and the community as a whole in the form of engaging in protests against school boards, participating in school councils, and organizing parent spaces to improve educational resources and standards. However, schools may not value or view these moments of advocacy as parent involvement—instead mislabeling these actions as angry, aggressive, and agitative (Cooper, 2009; Reynolds 2010). These negative, deficit views about parents of color may result in discriminatory treatment in the schools,

wherein some educators do not expect, welcome, or cultivate relationships with Black parents (Cooper, 2007, 2009; Fine, 1993; Reynolds, 2009, 2010, 2015; Wilson, 2019). This lack of expectation for participation or assumption of noninvolvement perpetuates unequal access and differential treatment of Black parents.

To strive for social justice for families in schools, the complete and equitable inclusion of those from all social identity groups must be included in the process, in order to shape children's educational needs and outcomes (Bell, 2016). This article centers Black parents because they, their children, and their families have experienced educational exclusion and disenfranchisement, and have faced educational inequities for decades in the United States (Chapman, 2013; Cooper; 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). At the same time, we also recognize that there is variation among Black families in terms of socioeconomic factors, contexts, beliefs, and experiences; they do not constitute one monolithic group. However, even with this variation, Black people in the United States are all affected by structural racism: patterns of action by which societal institutions create more burdens for and give fewer benefits to one race on an ongoing basis (Golash-Boza, 2016).

A social justice perspective calls for the fair and equitable distribution of resources and makes it imperative that these resources are especially accessible to individuals who are the least advantaged (Rawls, 2001). We delineate how race and racism mediate Black parents' interactions with schools by drawing on work from scholars who have applied CRT to education broadly (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and to studies of Black parents

more specifically (Reynolds, 2010; Wilson, 2019). Further, using the CC conceptual framework, we argue that parents' analysis of inequities in schools influences the reasons and ways they engage with their children's schools. When taken together, parents' critical analyses of racism in schools creates particular forms of parent participation—which we call critical parent–school engagement—that accounts for parents' intentions around their involvement and considers their understanding of racial inequities. Critical parent–school engagement reflects a social justice perspective in that it recognizes patterns and practices in schools that perpetuate inequity. By combining CRT (to contextually and historically understand Black parent participation) and CC (to examine the individual psychological processes that parents experience), this synthesis further extends literature that frames the developmental processes of Black parent advocacy in schools.

CRITICAL PARADIGM

The critical paradigm offers a broad epistemological category that encompasses many research positions, such as feminist theory, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and CRT (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Critical theories assume that we live in a world mediated by entrenched power dynamics and a firmly fixed power hierarchy. These theories acknowledge dominant ideologies, oppressive structures of power, and the pervasive nature of social inequality that is woven in institutions throughout society. Further, critical theory identifies the ways in which economic, political, gender, ethnic, and racial material conditions influence peoples' beliefs, behaviors, and experiences (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). These theories align well with the concept of social justice

in that they similarly require that dominant ideological frameworks and institutional patterns be confronted in order for some groups to not continuously be advantaged over others who are marginalized (Bell, 2016).

Both CRT and CC bring attention to oppressive systems and structures and have "successfully been used in the struggle for social justice in the past" (Bell, 2016, p. 16). CRT explicitly names hierarchical racial structures in society and asserts that race and racism are historically and socially constructed and have been normalized within our society (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). Although CRT foregrounds race and racism, the theory also recognizes the myriad ways racism interacts with other oppressive forces in society, such as patriarchy, classism, sexism, and homophobia. Applying CRT to education enables us to work toward redressing racial inequity and creating meaningful outcomes for youth in schools (Dixson & Anderson, 2018).

CC stems from the concept of *conscientização*, or conscientization, which refers to the process of learning the contradictions present in the social, political, and economic realms in order to act against the oppressive elements pervasive in those domains (Freire, 1970). According to CC, in order to overcome oppression, one must think deeply and seriously about the causes of such oppression. CC as a critical frame describes how individuals think about oppressive structures, how efficacious they feel about making change, and which behaviors they engage in to make such change. Similar to social justice education, CC makes connections

between the analysis of oppressive systems and action to interrupt and change observed oppression by connecting the personal to the sociopolitical context.

Linking these two conceptual frameworks that share roots in critiquing oppression and goals for liberation from oppression provides an opportunity to analyze historical and contemporary societal structures, along with the beliefs and actions individuals take to address inequities within those structures from different disciplinary standpoints. For instance, the CRT notion of permanence of racism, which states that racism is omnipresent in society (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), offers a sociological understanding of race and racism, and dimensions of CC such as critical reflection on perceived inequities, political efficacy, and critical action (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011) offer a psychological perspective. Together, these allow for a way to understand how racism influences the educational system and subsequent parent behaviors. This conceptual pairing extends research that critically explores Black parents' involvement but stops short of explaining how Black parents' analyses of race and racism shape their actions and efforts to ensure fair treatment and the academic success of their children in schools.

Race and Education: CRT and Contextual Considerations

Horace Mann, an educational pioneer and proponent of public schools, famously posited that education is a great equalizer of the conditions of men. Unfortunately, his belief has not been realized. Theorists have described ways that the education system reproduces social stratification and inequalities rather than truly providing all students with equal chances to succeed (Blanchett,

Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 1985). For example, within the past 60 years, achievement gaps by class, by race, and by gender in certain subjects have been well documented (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Kozol, 1991; Morris & Perry, 2016). Further, racialized student tracking, inequitable school funding, school resegregation, higher dropout rates for students of color, and disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion all put students of color at a collective disadvantage (Chapman, 2013; Shollenberger, 2015). These inequities represent the deep disparities that shape the experiences of Black students in schools. The realities of race and racism in schools pose a social justice issue that persistently undermines Mann's ideal from the 19th century: Public schools are not equalizers of opportunity.

Educational research has largely avoided racism as an explanation for discrepancies in student outcomes, choosing to focus instead on seemingly race-neutral class and gender analyses (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano, 1997). To better understand how racism is entrenched in the educational system, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) applied CRT to educational settings. CRT is based in the ontological belief that race is inextricably embedded in every aspect of American society, including hierarchical systems and structures that govern educational, economic, social, and political domains (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Omi & Winant, 1994). CRT has been used to theorize about, examine, and challenge the way that race and racism both implicitly and explicitly influence social structures, policies, and practices (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Yosso, 2005). Understanding the basic elements of CRT are essential for its application. First, permanence of racism asserts that race and racism are central, permanent, and fundamental in

understanding the way that U.S. society functions. Second, critique of liberalism challenges white supremacy and dominant ideology by refuting ideals such as objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Third, CRT is committed to social justice by working to eliminate oppression of people of color based on race, gender, and class. Fourth, the theory privileges the lived experiences and experiential knowledge of people of color through counterstorytelling and counternarratives as legitimate, valid, and necessary to understand race as an oppressive structure and to resist and disrupt the status quo. Finally, CRT engages an interdisciplinary approach. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) asserted that to better understand the effects of different systems of oppression, CRT in education must use the knowledge base and perspectives of other disciplines. As a framework, CRT defines and analyzes the ways that racial oppression operates at institutional and structural levels, both historically and in the present. This naming of the ways that oppression functions enables us to make sense of and act against the oppressive policies, practices, and behaviors that arise in the school context for Black parents.

CRT highlights the limitations of class-based narratives that are prevalent in views of parent involvement in schools. Howard and Reynolds (2008) found that, when class is held constant, race remains a salient factor that shapes Black families' experiences in schools. For instance, African American students who attend more affluent schools perform more poorly than their white peers in the same school, pointing to race as an important factor to consider in student achievement at school (Carter, 2005; Jenks & Phillips, 1998). Reynolds's (2009, 2010, 2015) research has examined Black middle-class parents and consistently found race and racism to be

strong mediators in relationships between participants and schools. Black middle-class parents have reported microaggressions that are steeped in racial bias (Pierce, 1974; Solorzano, 1998) and described the need to negotiate a dual existence, a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) in which they attempt to appear credible, respectable, in order for school officials to deem them worthy enough of being valuable partners for the educational well-being of their children.

When race is included in empirical analyses, it is usually viewed one of two ways—either as a variable to be included in a study or as a cultural influence (O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007). Viewing race solely as a variable without considering how racism is inextricably intertwined in society can lead to inaccurate conclusions across groups. For instance, research may find that Black students underperform on standardized tests but not consider race and racism as possible causes of that underperformance (e.g., bias in standardized tests, stereotype threat; see Helms, 1992). A reliance on race-comparative frameworks can lead to detrimental conclusions that Black students are intellectually inferior. Such analyses fail to interrogate the contexts and environments of these conditions and fall short in considering systemic oppression, neglect, and discriminatory policies and practices that affect students of color. CRT takes up where these decontextualized analyses fall short by centering race and racism in all considerations of institutional conditions and outcomes.

Exclusionary and discriminatory practices continue to marginalize Black families from the educational process. For instance, Decuir and Dixson (2004) explain whiteness as property by referring to Harris (1993), a CRT scholar in legal studies, who argues that whiteness becomes

a form of property to attain that has both social and material value, including privilege, access, and status (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). These rights affiliated with property are conferred to individuals and create a group that is then either validated or legitimized within society; that conferral also creates a privileged group with the ability to access high-quality education and to gain more access to resources, thus perpetuating the exclusion that Black parents have experienced. Even the most well-intentioned schools and teachers are affected by historically and contemporarily racist ideas and beliefs about Black students and their families (Milner, 2011), and educators' deficit views can keep schools from being "the great equalizer" they were once hoped to be.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness, or *conscientização*, is a construct discussed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) in his work with Brazilian peasants. His notion of CC describes how oppressed and marginalized individuals become aware of the social conditions around them and how they work to rectify those conditions. He focused on literacy as a way for individuals to "read the word" so that they could "read the world" and act to create positive change. This process is understood as ongoing and has been viewed as an "antidote" or way to break through the stifling effects of oppression in pursuit of liberation (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999).

Critiquing schools for not being the great equalizer is a preliminary form of critical social analysis, one of three main components theorized in modern CC (Watts et al., 2011). Critical social analysis (also referred to as critical reflection) refers to the analysis and rejection of

various forms of inequity—whether racial, gendered, or class-based—that limit well-being and human agency. On a continuum where, at one end, educational issues are attributed to oppressive structural forces and, at the other end, to individual differences, individuals who are more critically reflective view social inequity as more structural. For example, people who believe that racial inequities in education are caused more by social structures (e.g., inequitable school funding, biased standardized tests) than individual factors (e.g., lack of effort by students of color) may be described as engaging in a critical social analysis or having a "critical stance" (Watts et al., 2011). Pairing critical reflection with the contextual and historical clarity around racism that CRT provides a lens into delineating factors that may influence Black parents' subsequent actions.

In addition to critical reflection, CC comprises political efficacy and critical action (Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2017; Watts et al., 2011). Political efficacy refers to an individual's perceived ability or motivation to make change through individual and/or collective action. Critical action is individual or collective action taken to change aspects of society that are deemed inequitable (Diemer, McWhirter, Ozer, & Rapa, 2015; Watts et al., 2011). The three components of CC serve as the psychological aspect of this theoretical integration and allows for a more comprehensive picture of how Black parents' perceptions of society and their ability to interact informs their involvement with their children's schools.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Decades of research have revealed that when parents are involved in their children's education, children experience improved academic achievement, as evidenced by higher grades and test scores, better attendance, higher rates of homework completion, fewer placements in special education, more positive school attitudes and behavior, and higher graduation rates (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Jeynes, 2005; Robinson & Harris, 2014). The recognition of these positive outcomes has led the U.S. government to develop initiatives for states, districts, and schools to focus on prioritizing school–family partnerships and exploring ways for collaborative efforts. However, as Rogers (2006) has argued, these initiatives often fail because there is a fundamental lack of understanding of the problems that plague communities of color and those who are less affluent in this country.

The emphasis on parent involvement is now prevalent in schools. Parents are expected to participate in everyday school activities (Fernández & López, 2017). Even still, no one definition fully encompasses the numerous forms of parent involvement, although many definitions include both school- and home-based behaviors. With school-based involvement, parents are present in the school building for events such as parent–teacher association meetings, open houses, and parent–teacher conferences. They serve on school governance bodies, volunteer in the school or as chaperones, and communicate with teachers or other school personnel. Home-based involvement includes parent–child communication about school, assistance with homework, taking children to events and spaces that foster academic success, relaying messages around the importance of academic success, and efforts to create a learning environment within the home.

Taking children to visit museums, libraries, and zoos is also considered home-based school involvement actions (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Although both forms of involvement represent actions parents take for the benefit of their children's education, home-based behaviors are less likely to be recognized as parent involvement because the behaviors occur outside of the school building, unseen by practitioners.

Another component to consider about reasons Black parents might be unseen in the school setting is their child's developmental period. For example, as children transition from elementary to secondary school, parental involvement at the school site declines. As adolescents develop and take a more active role in their education, they subsequently are more autonomous and often do not want parents to visit the school (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). In a meta-analysis of 50 empirical reports and articles, Hill and Tyson (2009) sought to synthesize the extent to which parental involvement was positively associated with academic outcomes, which types of parental involvement were most strongly related to positive academic outcomes, and explore differences between Black and white parents. They found that academic socialization, or parents' communication of their achievement expectations and value of education, had the strongest positive relationship with achievement at middle school over and beyond home- and school-based involvement. This finding is not surprising. This developmental trend may explain why parents are less visible to teachers and school administrators at the secondary level. Further, academic socialization messages transmitted by any parent to his or her child becomes an important parental involvement behavior during adolescence and remains

unseen to teachers. Hill and Tyson (2009) explained academic socialization as a strategy dependent on parents' knowledge and resources as well as on schools' ability to provide those resources, which may be difficult if there is a strained relationship between school and parent.

Although research has continuously found positive associations between parent involvement and student academic outcomes, it is important to recognize that parents have varying motivations for engaging in these actions. Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) extended a framework that considers the how, why, and whom of parent involvement. They contended that important considerations include how parents are involved in their children's schooling, as this contributes to the effectiveness of such involvement, and why parents get involved in the first place. Further, in line with developmental models, Pomerantz et al. (2007) suggest that some parental involvement behaviors may serve as an example for children about how to take control of an issue in order to create positive change. This parallels results from a qualitative study of Black parents that found that parents are highly involved in their children's education in middle school, but as children entered high school, parents hoped that the early examples of their involvement would serve as a model for how their children can advocate for themselves (Marchand, Settles, Diemer, & Rowley, 2019).

Even without consensus, much of what has traditionally been deemed effective or valued parent involvement reflects school-based involvement behaviors and Epstein's (2001) framework of six types of involvement: parenting (e.g., basic child rearing), communicating (e.g., communication between home and school), volunteering, (e.g., having parents assist in

school activities), learning at home (e.g., parent assistance with schoolwork at home), decision making (e.g., including parents in school decisions), and community collaborations (e.g., linking families to community resources and programs). These behaviors create a laundry list of sorts that defines what "good parents" should do. Essentially, Epstein calls for parents' deferential support of schools' agendas and discounts behaviors that parents engage in at home; her lists also neglect considerations of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Olivos, 2006). For example, behaviors such as volunteering at school are more easily fulfilled by parents who do not work, who are supported by the income of a spouse, or have a professional occupation that allows for flexible scheduling. Much of the research on parent involvement, as well as how schools define the concept, privileges the more conservative and traditional, school-based definitions of what it means for a parent to be involved (Cooper, 2009; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau, 1989; Olivos, 2006; Wilson, 2019; Yull, Wilson, Murray, & Parham, 2018). The activities that are valued symbolize and promote white middle- to upper-class forms of involvement, thereby excluding alternate forms of involvement in which historically marginalized groups of parents engage.

Additionally, schools often have an agenda that supports a deferential dynamic in which parents are involved but not too involved—for example, parents who support the school's agenda without imposing their own ideas, opinions, or questions (Cooper, 2009; Doucet, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). There is a sweet spot, so to speak, of parents who are willing to volunteer or be a teacher's aide of sorts. Parents who take on too much responsibility or have too much say are

viewed as "pushy" or as thinking that they know more about their child's schooling than the teacher does, which can make teachers feel professionally undermined (Lareau, 1987).

To move beyond definitions of parent involvement that have been constructed without consideration of race, racism, and power dynamics, it is imperative to include an examination of the context, structural racism, and barriers that Black families face in order to understand how those factors influence how Black parents enact and perceive involvement. The CRT framework provides this and also allows for emphasis on Black parents' valuing of education. The barriers that Black parents have had to endure and challenge in order to educate their children are long documented. For instance, following the Civil War, Black parents pressed for, founded, and ran many Black schools, representing the importance Black parents have placed on education even in the face of racism and the inequitable treatment of their children (Anderson, 1988). In the following section, we discuss how structural racism influences Black parents' involvement, including barriers parents face in their interactions with schools, educators' perceptions of parents, alternate methods of engagement, the ways parents view schools as a mainstream institution, and the myriad ways that trust between these two stakeholders groups may be compromised.

Intersections of Critical Consciousness and Critical Race Theory

Numerous structural barriers impede Black parents' participation in schools. These barriers can be social, cultural, linguistic, and economic in nature and also include the timing of school-based events (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Cooper, 2019), lack of social networks (Lareau, 1987), lack of

knowledge of how schools are organized (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), and economic constraints. When parents were asked about barriers to their involvement, they listed lack of autonomy and flexibility, inability to leave or get days off to attend school events, and not having a car as impediments to their presence at the school (Finders & Lewis, 1994). These barriers create a racial divide that supports ease of access for some parents and restricts others. For example, McNeal (1999) found differences in a traditional assessment of parent involvement (participation in parent–teacher organization, parental monitoring, and use of educational support strategies) by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, with the greatest differences being in levels of school-based involvement. Teachers' views of nonparticipating parents, or those who are not physically present in school buildings as a result of barriers, remain based on a deficit model. Instead of readily categorizing parents who face these barriers as uninvolved, educators should be more aware of the structural constraints that Black parents face when they make judgments about parents' level of concern for their children's education. Otherwise, educators' definition and metric of parent involvement may be misrepresentative of Black families.

Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that when Black parents approached their children's schools, they were faced with more barriers and difficulties than white parents from the same social class. With a sample of 24 parents (12 white parents and 12 Black parents), Lareau and Horvat's (1999) interviews suggested that when both Black and white parents approach a school with suspicion and hostility, white parents do not have to consider the historical pattern of racism in schools that Black parents face. Rather, their whiteness in and of itself allows them to enter

the school and expect administrators to be helpful, which gives those parents an advantage and enables them to comply with the deferential standard of school involvement (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). This work concluded that race independently shapes school experiences by highlighting the social and cultural resources that white parents possess and can easily convert into education advantages. This supports the CRT's notion of whiteness as property because these parent behaviors align with, comply with, and are validated and legitimized by the dominant ideology in the broader society.

Racism also affects parent involvement through school personnel's perceptions of Black parents. Although it can be more difficult for Black parents to engage in school-based involvement because of various barriers they may face, it is possible that even when they engage in ways that schools prefer, their involvement is still devalued. Many teachers and principals unfortunately view Black parents through a deficit lens and fail to attribute their oppressive experiences to a system that limits their access (Cooper, 2003; Johnson, 2015). For instance, studies show differing reports of school-based involvement between parents and teachers (Calzada et al., 2015; McKay, Atkins, Hawking, Brown, & Lynn, 2003). In a study examining Latino and Afro-Caribbean immigrant parents' school involvement, parents rated their involvement in their children's education nearly twice as high as their children's teachers rated those same actions (Calzada et al., 2015). This incongruence between parents' and teachers' ratings may be because teachers discount the involvement behaviors of Black parents even when those behaviors parallel the more mainstream, recognized forms of parent involvement.

Research also suggests that teachers may reject Black parent involvement by making them feel unwelcomed and requesting that they do not participate. In a qualitative study Reynolds, Howard, and Jones (2015) reported experiences of Black fathers' efforts to engage in schools on behalf of their children. This kind of participation, what Diamond, Wang, and Gomez (2004) term *front-stage involvement*, is most recognized by educators (Epstein, 1991). Yet these Black fathers reported feeling unwelcomed at their children's schools, disrespected, and discriminated against by school officials, and the reported being looked at with suspicion and fear by almost everyone they encountered at the school. Two weeks into the school year, one father in the study was asked not to walk his first grader all the way to his classroom in the mornings because people "did not know who he was" and were "uncomfortable." He was asked to instead walk his son from his home directly across the street to the corner, near the school, and then have his son walk into the building alone. Instances like this detail a paradox whereby parents of color, especially Black fathers, are largely criticized for not being involved; however, when they are involved, they are faced with numerous barriers and are dismissed or repressed by the school because of biases and stereotypes. This supports the CRT notion of whiteness as property because property functions in several ways: It provides rights of disposition, of use and enjoyment, and the absolute right of exclusion, and it also confers reputation and status (Ladson-Billings, 1999). The exclusion from the school space results in a "lose–lose" situation for Black parents: They are pathologized if they do interact with schools and vilified if they do not.

The recognition of racism in schools coupled with awareness of the prevailing deficit views of Black parents may make parents more comfortable engaging in home-based involvement actions. For instance, unlike Diamond et al. (2004), Bhargava and Witherspoon (2015) noted a shift in activity and found that Black parents are more engaged in home-based involvement than school-based involvement or volunteerism. Jackson and Remillard (2005) found that about 30% of Black parents they interviewed attended school functions on a regular basis, but all reported monitoring their children's progress in school and finding ways to monitor their children's learning experiences outside of the school setting. In a study of 161 Black parents, reports of awareness of racism were positively associated with reports of home-based involvement and negatively correlated with reports of school-based involvement (McKay et al., 2003). These studies exemplify how Black parents are involved in their children's education but perhaps less so at the school site because of the discomfort of racial bias in their interactions with school officials and their perceptions of the school as an unwelcoming space.

Parents may harbor negative feelings toward schools because of previous direct or vicarious negative experiences (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Further observations of blatant racism or feelings of discrimination may cause Black parents to take on a "defensive stance" when interacting in school settings (Cooper, 2019, p. 53). Even with clear invitations to school events, Black parents may be reticent if they perceive that school officials hold discriminatory attitudes and biases toward them (Finders & Lewis, 1994). In a CC perspective, these parents are assuming what Watts et al. (2011) refer to as a critical stance, or an

understanding of the ways structural racism creates societal inequities. These perceptions may also be informed by parents' own experiences when they were students themselves or transfer from their experiences with other institutions. For example, research has found a connection between Black mothers' memories of racial discrimination in their own schooling and their subsequent level of involvement in their children's school (Cooper, 2005, 2007; Rowley, Helaire, & Banerjee, 2010). Conversely, it is possible that mothers who remembered their own teachers negatively and felt less comfortable with their child's teacher viewed their involvement as an important way to protect their children. Therefore, whether these experiences of discrimination occur as a child or as an adult, they may inform parents' behavior or perceptions of their ability to engage with schools in meaningful ways. This supports the CRT's emphasis on the experiential knowledge of people of color as valid and legitimate.

In the context of schools, trust is essential for cooperation toward a common goal—in this case, quality education for children. However, trust between Black Americans and U.S. institutions may be hard to establish. In a survey of adults in the United States, 61% of Black Americans and 53% of Latinos reported low levels of trust in the fairness of American society on a social trust index, as compared to only 32% of white Americans (Taylor, Funk, & Clark, 2007). These statistics are not surprising, considering the numerous instances of discrimination, mistreatment, exclusion, and even execution by state-sanctioned and federal institutions. The court systems, police, social services, private and public industries, health-care systems, and schools all have had their discriminatory practices highlighted via social media and the news. If

Black people perceive that an institution is not procedurally just, then trust is near impossible to establish (Tyler, Goff, & MacCoun, 2015); schools are not exempt from this.

To achieve social justice in schools, Black parents must have access to and the opportunity for full and equitable participation in the school space. However, if effective parent involvement is intended to be a partnership between institutions and families (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Johnson, 2015), one must consider what may thwart the formation of positive relationships between Black parents and schools. As Yeager, Purdie-Vaughns, Hooper, and Cohen (2017) posited, a prerequisite for institutional trust is the perception that institutions are "procedurally just" and that those within the institution have "personal regard" and respect for those being served (p. 659). Awareness of racial inequities may lead Black parents to be wary and distrustful, which may in turn undermine their attempts to engage in the traditional ways they are expected to be involved in their children's schools (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008; Ross, Marchand, Cox, & Rowley, 2018). It may be unwise for Black parents to blindly trust schools, as "parents who do not question, challenge, and critique their schools and their practices . . . are entrusting the fate of their children to the schools" (Howard & Reynolds, 2008, p. 92).

In the context of schools, trust is especially essential for cooperation toward a common goal—in this case, quality education for Black children. Given extensive outcome data, Black parents' lack of faith in schools is likely rooted in an unearned trust or mistrust, as schools have consistently failed to meet the needs of Black students. Parker and Villalpando (2007) asserted

that the issue of trust and mistrust between families of colors and education leaders and teachers cannot be ignored when trying to achieve racial equity in schools. The idea of a common goal relates to the CRT's notion of interest convergence, the idea that white Americans would never have supported the civil rights gains of Black Americans if they did not *also* benefit from supporting certain political concessions (Bell, 1980). In other words, initiatives and decisions that are beneficial for people of color emerge only when they are also in the best interest of white Americans (Salter & Haugen, 2017). In the case of school trust, a CRT analysis may suggest a lack of interest convergence because schools do not perceive that they will gain from mutual trust with Black parents.

This is an important conundrum. Even with low trust in schools, parents still want their children to be successful and fairly treated, and they must have some relationship with a school to ensure that success. Friesen and Huff (1990, as cited in Burke, 2012) hypothesized that families who advocate for their children do so because of a foundational distrust in the school system. Black parents' understandings of inequities and their consequent distrust in the school system influences their decisions on how to engage and undoubtedly informs their perceptions of the schools, their comfort inside of them, and whether they believe that the school treats and represents them fairly. These perceptions may result in two divergent outcomes—parents may become more present in the schools because of this distrust and their desire to ensure that their child is treated fairly and is successful, or conversely, they may pull away if they believe that schools are unjust and untrustworthy.

In a recent study of Black parents in a Southern California school district, Latunde (2018) delineated the distrust that underserved parents can harbor that can also undermine partnership efforts. Parents in this study formed a district-sanctioned organization and sought to engage parents as a collective around the systemic issues that Black students faced in their schools. The formation of this parent collective speaks directly to Howard and Reynolds's (2008) study:

> One of the themes that emerged from the focus group discussion was the need for a space to network with other African American parents. Several of the participants stated that parents needed a consistent place to meet, network and share information about various resources available to their children. The importance of collaboration seemed to be based on a common set of experiences that many of the parents believe their children face in what are supposed to be better school climates. A number of the parents spoke of what they believed to be unfair disciplinary practices their children experienced, while others spoke to the lack of cultural and ethnic diversity in the curriculum, some discussed the need for more African American teachers and administrators in the district. (p. 93)

The parents in Latunde's (2018) study formed such a group, negotiated with the district for recognition and resources to facilitate their regular meetings, brought in consultants to educate them about the collective problems Black students were experiencing in the district—such as low test scores, poor attendance, overrepresentation in suspensions and expulsions, and disproportionate special education designations (particularly emotional disturbance)—and provide them with strategies to engage the district around their concerns. This group of Black

parents leaned on one another for support as they pushed past their distrust of schools together, sought solutions to systemic problems they observed, and interfaced with school officials who were sometimes reluctant and slow to change. They deemed their collective efforts as necessary and powerful, as some had attempted to advocate for their children individually with little success. These parents looked to other parents in the group as allies in a struggle for their students.

Much of parent involvement research misses the opportunity to examine how the often oppressive structure of schools precludes the participation of Black families. Not many researchers have sought instances in which minoritized parents unconventionally engage schools, like the parents in Latunde's (2018) study. To move beyond definitions of parent involvement that are constructed without considering prevalent racial inequities, it is imperative to examine cultural, structural, and contextual mediating factors rooted in racism that may make Black parents seem absent, apathetic, and uninvolved. With careful consideration of the roles of race and racism in shaping the lived experiences of Black parents, a more inclusive, expansive definition of parent involvement can be developed. Therefore, to represent more fully Black parents' engagement in schools, their understandings of schools as systems must be connected to their subsequent behaviors. To this end, CC theory can help explore how parents' beliefs about racial inequities influence their motivation to participate, perceptions of self-efficacy, and behaviors around their children's education.

Critical Reflection

Black parents' psychological processes are just as important to consider as the context and structural forces that affect their lived experiences. Critical reflection calls for the inclusion of historical context as a way to better understand societal inequities, with an emphasis on understanding the root causes of societal disparities in order to attain social justice (Watts et al., 2011). Theoretically pairing critical reflection with the contextual and historical clarity around racism that CRT provides can offer explanations for the actions Black parents take (or do not take) in schools. Parents who are critically reflective would attribute educational issues such as low enrollment of Black students in advanced placement and honors courses to structural causes. More specifically, these parents would be critically aware of inequitable systems, policies, and historical conditions such as racialized tracking that disproportionately enroll Black students in remedial and special education courses (Chapman, 2013; Watts et al., 2011). Conversely, those who are less critically reflective may view societal disparities as more individualized and believe that social systems and opportunities are equal, and therefore disparities within them are due to a lack of ability or effort on behalf of Black children (Watts et al., 2011). For instance, the view that Black children are less invested in school is a more individualized explanation of Black–white achievement gaps that does not recognize the gap as due to disparate opportunities, which supports the notion of liberalism and meritocracy that CRT challenges (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012).

Although parents' critical reflection has not been explicitly studied as such, numerous qualitative studies have focused on parents' perceptions of schools (Cooper, 2003, 2009; Crozier, 1999; Howard & Reynolds, 2009; Olivos, 2006). Cooper (2003) found that Black mothers from

low-income and working-class backgrounds viewed schools not as a meritocratic institution but "as sites of resistance where they try to prevent resource and pedagogical inequity from eroding their children's ability to attain the education they need to succeed in a competitive world" (p. 113). Similarly, in another qualitative study exploring Black parents' beliefs around the role of race in their child's education, mothers considered the school's racial composition as well as behaviors and views of school personnel, and they were keenly aware of the discrimination their children may face (Williams, Banerjee, Lozada-Smith, Lambouths, & Rowley, 2017). The study participants were mothers of first graders, and even with young children new to the school system, parents were determined to intervene and advocate in the case that they perceived race as negatively shaping their children's' educational experience. Their reflections support the CRT concept of permanence of racism; the parents recognized the normalized way that race is interwoven into everyday life. These studies exemplify how Black parents are critical and active in their attempts to ensure that their children do not receive an inequitable education and to identify systemic inequities within that space.

Parents who are more critically reflective and engage in structural analysis may enter school prepared to experience racism. Theorists have posited that having an awareness of systemic racism may serve as a remedy for such oppression (Watts et al., 1999). Therefore, these parents may psychologically benefit because they do not attribute racist interactions to themselves or their children but rather to external structures and issues. In an act of resistance to this racism, some parents may choose not to engage schools at all or to do so minimally (Olivos,

2006). These examples show a direct link between parents' beliefs and awareness of oppressive structures in the school and how they situate themselves in relation to the school. Following the CC paradigm, these beliefs, coupled with parents' motivation and feelings of their own efficacy, inform the actions in which they decide to engage.

Self-Efficacy

For parents to enact meaningful change, they must believe they are able or efficacious. The psychologist Albert Bandura (1997) posited that individuals must believe that they have personal control over the decisions and activities they undertake and that they will be successful. When thinking about Black parents' involvement in schools, it is important to consider whether parents believe that they are able to produce a desired result. Parents who have a higher sense of self-efficacy communicate higher expectations to their children and provide support that results both directly and indirectly in positive educational processes (Diemer & Li, 2011). When parents have a strong and positive sense of their own efficacy, they also feel more able to engage in effective problem-solving efforts with schools (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). However, various experiences and thoughts may affect parents' feelings of efficacy, such as awareness of structural barriers that constrain ability to act or past experiences with schools.

Political efficacy is a construct studied largely in political science. It has been adapted and applied to CC work and is generally defined as people's internal beliefs about their capacity to make effective change (Watts et al., 2011). It can further be understood as one's sense of agency and motivations for making social change. In the literature on parent involvement, self-

efficacy is defined as parents' belief that they can exert a positive impact on their children's academic outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). More specifically, parental self-efficacy is parents' belief that they can effect change in school structures or policies or engage in instances of advocacy to combat observed inequities.

Parents' motivational beliefs are informed not only by their self-efficacy but also by their role construction, or how they believe they should interact with their children's schools (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Extending this notion of role construction, Lewis-McCoy (2014) discussed how white and Black families engage with schools differently. He posited that white families engage in a behavior referred to as opportunity hoarding, whereas Black families act as beneficiaries. Opportunity hoarding captures the ways parents not only influence their own children but also limit and constrain the ability of other families to access finite resources in schools, often disproportionately and negatively affecting Black families. Further, he contends that it is common for white parents to act as consumers of their children's education, meaning that they regard schools as resources that are malleable and customizable. They see themselves with the agency necessary to change school spaces to accommodate their desires and needs. Conversely, Black parents assume the role of beneficiary, viewing the school as a space for their children to receive a "good education" without much space for customization. The explanations of these differential actions suggest that role construction and aspects of critical reflection may vary by race and that Black parents have different views of how they should ideally interact with their children's school.

Parents' feelings of efficacy may drive their actions with the school. Conversely, parents may avoid involvement if they believe that their actions will not result in positive change. We assert that these motivational beliefs do play a role in determining parent involvement behaviors, but they do not fully explain parents' subsequent engagement with their children's school. Rather, parents' motivation to engage together with their analysis of the school as a system may result in differential forms of action. The recognition of a problem through parents' critical reflection is not enough for change to be made; parents must also believe that their actions will be successful and impactful. Therefore, the two components must be considered together. By better clarifying the links between Black parents' beliefs about racism, their efficacy, and how it may affect their motivation and actions in their children's schools, scholars can gain a more advanced understanding of the interconnected factors that influence parent engagement.

Critical Action

The final component of CC refers to action taken to produce societal change. Once individuals recognize an issue and their ability to act, action follows either collectively or individually (Freire, 1970). More broadly, this individual or collective action is in an effort to change an aspect of society to bring about social justice in institutional policies and practices (Watts et al., 2011). A critical approach to the topic of parent involvement would hypothesize that Black parents' perceived lack of involvement is a consequence of structures and systems that shape the lived experiences of people of color and create inequities (Fernández & López, 2017). We

suggest that critical parent engagement is a form of critical action that is different from traditional conceptualizations of parent school involvement.

We intentionally use the term *engagement* instead of *involvement*, as *engagement* is a more inclusive term that recognizes an array of parents' efforts to motivate and nurture children's educational growth in various spaces (Reynolds, 2010; Wilson, 2019). The use of the word *critical* in *critical parent engagement* emphasizes that parents recognize racism or marginalization in schools instead of the traditional forms of engagement that schools recognize and prefer (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Critical parent engagement, undergirded by an awareness and understanding of how society influences individual action, is different from dominant forms of involvement and engagement because it takes into consideration the dynamics and influences of race and racism in explaining the experiences of Black families in schools while also recognizing parents' advocacy for their children. Freire (1970) would have referred to this combination of reflection and action as "praxis." Given the salience of race in schooling, it essential to incorporate these dynamics of Black families and schools into a conceptual framework of Black parent involvement.

Scholars have used CRT methodologies such as counterstorytelling (Reynolds, 2010; Yosso, 2005) to explore how parents are interested and involved in their children's schools in ways that we consider critical parent engagement. For example, Doucet's (2011) study of the school engagement of Haitian immigrant parents recognized reasons for Haitian parents' resistance to creating partnerships with schools. Through her use of counterstories, Doucet

described how Haitian parents resist traditional forms of parent involvement because they associate schools with the Americanization of their children. These parents intentionally maintain privacy, are strict, and discourage friendships in hopes of retaining aspects of the home culture for their children's benefit. However, the same parents also felt compelled to go to the school and resolve issues when they suspected mistreatment or discrimination, "rooted in a deeply felt need to protect and ensure their children's futures" (Doucet, 2011, p. 2706). Counterstorytelling as a methodology in this study amplified the voice of a community who is regularly overlooked in order to share instances of advocacy and parents' investments in their children's futures.

Similarly, Howard and Reynolds (2008) employed CRT and qualitative interviews to articulate middle-class Black parents' varying definitions of what it means to be involved in their children's schools. Parents' responses varied from traditional participation, such as attending back-to-school nights or open houses, to more critical engagement, such as demanding that their children receive certain services (e.g., Individualized Education Programs, access to speech pathologists) that the school and district are required to provide (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Parents who stay informed and feel comfortable challenging, questioning, and critiquing their children's schools possess an awareness of racism in schools that is a form of critical reflection that also facilitates their political efficacy. When parents recognize that blindly leaving the fate of their children to schools may cause them to be negatively affected by racial dynamics and inequitable structures, it is even more important for them to engage and advocate.

Rowley et al. (2010) described a vigilant form of parent involvement with a sole purpose of protection from mistreatment and discrimination. After experiencing acute criticism and discrimination from school officials, Black parents may find it even more necessary to engage and advocate to ensure favorable outcomes for their children. Vigilant parent involvement is similar to critical parent engagement in that both are racialized and conscious actions that Black parents engage in to make sure that teachers do not mistreat their children. However, critical parent engagement posits a recognition and analysis of structural racism and historical racism in schools. Various forms of critical parent engagement can result from this recognition; for example, if parents ensure that teachers know who they are, they eliminate the possibility for teachers to hold negative stereotypes about their involvement. Parents may make it a point to understand chains of command or how to advocate effectively if they suspect maltreatment or discrimination. Collaboration among parents has been documented in parental involvement research (Howard & Reynolds, 2008) and exemplifies group agency, whereby parents exert a powerful collective voice in their children's education in the face of systemic racism and exclusion.

Discussion and Future Directions

Our integration of CRT and CC theories provides a foundation for understanding the formation of Black parents' critical parent engagement and holds promise for advancing future work that reimagines Black parents' engagement. For instance, future research can employ critical parent engagement to consider the context and psychological processes that inform parents' behavior in

schools. Specifically, future measures of parental involvement could use this theoretical contribution to ensure that they are relevant to the lived experience of Black parents and also live up to the ideal of equity for all in public schools. For instance, many current measures of school-based involvement do not consider the barriers that Black parents face or alternative ways that they advocate for their children's education. Therefore, the results of such measures may be limited because they assess only a narrow example of what is considered valid parent involvement. Additionally, to extend this preliminary integration of CRT and CC, future work in this area should explore how different combinations of parents' critical reflection, role construction, and self-efficacy interact and result in various parent actions. For example, parents who believe it is their responsibility to ensure positive academic outcomes for their children but do not feel efficacious in their ability to advocate in schools may engage in home-based strategies or supplement their children's extracurricular academic experiences. Alternatively, critically reflective parents who feel efficacious might advocate at the school site.

This model of critical parent engagement can be put into practice as well. Schools and districts should engage in professional development that focuses on explicating how racism hinders the positive development and academic outcomes of Black students and families. By challenging the pervasive nature of racism in schools, teachers, administrators, and district officials can address issues of injustice that Black students and families face. A focus on families is critical, as parents are often blamed when students do not achieve optimal outcomes. If educators knew the antecedents to Black parent engagement and their vigilance around race in

schools, then educators may gain empathy and understanding. Articulating the societal influences that affect families through a social justice framework can enable researchers to contextualize the lived experiences that families face and further enable practitioners and policy makers to create better solutions that promote positive outcomes for individuals, families, and communities more generally (James, Lazarevic, Lee, Kuvalanka, & McGeorge, 2016; Lerner, 2015). In addition, nonprofit organizations that work with Black parents can use critical parent engagement to clarify the historically strained relationships between Black parents and schools; to discover strategies to address power, privilege, and oppressive systems; and to find ways for Black families to thrive in these systems. Last, as this model lays out the basic arguments of what schools value, the concepts outlined here could prove informative for parents who are sometimes unaware of the macro-level dynamics that mediate their experiences with school officials.

CONCLUSION

Although research shows the positive relationship between parent involvement and children's learning and achievement in schools (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995), it is important to understand factors that facilitate or hinder parents' ability to get involved. Social justice for families in schools requires identifying and naming the socially constructed dynamics that create institutional oppression. Race is one factor, and through the CRT framework we have shown how racism influences the experiences of Black parents and their children within schools. Parents' critical analyses of how race functions in schools may

determine the ways they participate, engage, and advocate on behalf of their children. By employing components of CC, we have advanced a conceptual frame that connects parents' critical reflections of racial inequities with the perceptions of and motivations for their own involvement. We suggest that Black parents' critical reflections and motivations influence the ways that they critically engage and advocate for their children in the school system. In summary, this model of parent CC supports an understanding of how these dimensions work in tandem and can answer questions of how race and inequitable structures influence Black parents' school involvement, with the goal of attaining social justice for all in public schools.

Author Note

This research was supported by the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program under Grant DGE 1256260 and the National Corporation for National and Community Service Grant F048806.

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